

## **“He Is No Different from Other Men”: Complimenting and Responding to Compliments through Membership Categorization Practices**

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This brief analysis examines the interactional practice of complimenting and responding to compliments using MCA. The topic is not new; numerous CA studies have brought to light how people tend to respond to compliments and how such tendencies can be understood in terms of the sequential organization of turn-taking. In American English, for instance, a compliment tends to call for a response in the following turn, which downgrades praise or shifts the referent (Pomerantz, 1978). While CA’s microanalysis of turn-by-turn interaction has enabled us to “specify the normative structuring and logics of particular courses of social action” (Heritage, 2005), MCA is gradually gaining the attention of scholars of social interaction for its ability to reveal “members’ methodical practices in describing the world, and displaying their understanding of the world and of the commonsense routine workings of society” (Fitzgerald, Housley, & Butler, 2009, p. 47). This paper offers an example of MCA applied to a compliment-response sequence.

The following extract was taken and translated from a Korean radio show that airs at night (see Appendix for original transcript). The host of the show, Sun, is a female celebrity. Once a week, celebrity guests are invited to stay in the studio and discuss various topics concerning their professional and/or private lives. The guest on the episode examined for this analysis is Kim, an actress who, at the time of recording, had been married for about 6 years and had a 5-year-old daughter.

Right before this extract, Sun and Kim have been talking about the fact that both Kim and her husband still, even after becoming parents, like going out for drinks with friends and how she gets drunk every time. Sun and Kim have just shared a laugh over Kim’s rather self-deprecating jokes about a quarrel she had with her husband days before concerning her drinking habit. According to Kim, however, it did not last long because now she and her husband are more like friends than lovers. After the laughing subsides, Sun provides the following (line 01) as a sort of assessment of Kim’s story.

- 01 Sun: but what is so- fortunate is (.) men say at first  
02 ooh I like a woman who drinks well but the:n,  
03 Kim: when she becomes their woman-,  
04 Sun: yea:h,=  
05 Kim: =>they hate-,<=  
06 Sun: =they hate it so much y’know they become  
07 controlling and all that but,  
08 Kim: yeah.  
09 Sun: → he’s not like that.  
10 Kim: → because he needs me to get drunk so he can  
11 hang out longer, A::hah=[heh heh heh heh heh,]  
12 Sun: [heh heh heh heh heh,]  
((lines omitted))  
28 Kim: heh oh so I,

- 29 Sun: ye:s.=  
30 Kim: → =need to be doz- sleeping or something,  
31 Sun: °yes.°  
32 Kim: → so guys can go somewhere else heh  
33 [h↑ahahahaha,]  
34 Sun: [((claps)) ]

In line 01, Sun frames what is to come as something “so fortunate,” then begins to state what “men say.” Here, Sun explicitly invokes the category of ‘men’ in the membership categorization device (MCD) of ‘gender’ through her use of a plural form, and then ties the category-bound activity (“say that they like a woman who drinks well”) to ‘men.’ Sun’s description of what men say in lines 01-02 is also oriented to as a categorical practice by Kim, as we can see in the ensuing exchange (lines 01 to 08), in which Kim and Sun co-establish what Sun began in line 01—the point that men change their words and attitudes once they are in a relationship.

After Kim and Sun establish “what men are like,” Sun says that Kim’s husband is “not like that” (line 09). Here, Sun’s evaluation of Kim’s husband as not being like other men is a positive one. In the end, the declaration “he’s not like that” (line 09) is what Sun wanted to say through the turns that began in line 01, framed as something fortunate. Now we see how Sun “went categorical” (Stokoe, 2012) in order to arrive at a positive evaluation, and thus a compliment, of Kim’s husband. In other words, if the behavior of Kim’s husband—such as being liberal and letting her drink—departs from a set of negative qualities that he might be prone to possess by virtue of his simply being a ‘male,’ it can be seen in a positive light. Categorizing ‘men’ and characterizing members as territorial and controlling provides the grounds for commending a member of the same category who is “not like that” (line 09).

In line 10, Kim responds to Sun’s compliment by explaining that her husband needs her to be drunk so that he can stay out longer. In subsequent turns (lines 28, 30, 32), Kim suggests that her husband’s motivation for letting her drink is, in fact, the chance to hang out with his guy friends later—without his wife—as opposed to his possessing some unique quality that sets him apart from other members of the ‘men’ category Kim’s husband is, in the end, no different from other men. Thus, what Kim is effectively doing is bringing her husband back to the category of ‘men’ from which Sun had freed him, thereby downgrading Sun’s praise (Pomerantz, 1978). In other words, Kim downgrades the praise by also “going categorical” (Stokoe, 2012), this time by reversing the process through which Sun’s compliment was made. The behavior of Kim’s husband actually fits the category-bound activities of the category ‘men.’

This short analysis examined the ways in which categorical practices are utilized to perform the social actions of complimenting and responding to a compliment. An in-depth, line-by-line microanalysis of the interaction between Sun and Kim shows that the participants can “go categorical” (Stokoe, 2012) in order to justify the complimenting act and also to downgrade such praise.

## REFERENCES

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### APPENDIX: Original Transcript

- 01 Sun: 근데 참? 너무- 다행인게 (.) 남자들은 초반에는: 술잘하는여자  
but really very fortunate thing (.) men at first drinks well do women  
**but what is so- fortunate is (.) men say at first ooh I like a woman who**
- 02 오 좋아 이러다가,  
oh good say  
**drinks well but the:n,**
- 03 Kim: 막상 자기여자가 되면-,  
when own woman become-  
**when she becomes their woman-,**
- 04 Sun: 예:.=  
yea:h,  
**yea:h,=**
- 05 Kim: =>시러-,<=  
hate  
**=>they hate-,<=**
- 06 Sun: 되게 시러하잖아요: 단속하구- 근데:.=  
very hate control and- but:.=  
**=they hate it so much y'know they become controlling and all that but,**
- 07 Kim: =예:.  
yeah  
**=yea:h.**
- 08 Sun: 쯤 안 그런거 같애.  
a bit not so appear  
**he's not like that.**
- 09 Kim: 제가 취해야 오빠가 더 오래 노니까요.: 어:  
I get drunk so oppa more longer hang out:t. a:h  
**because he needs me to get drunk so he can hang out longer. A:h**
- 10 어:::=[ ㅎㅎ ㅎㅎ ㅎㅎ ㅎㅎ,]  
a::h.=hehehehehehehe,

- A::hah=[heh heh heh heh heh,]**
- 11 Sun: [ㅎㅎㅎㅎㅎㅎㅎㅎ,]  
heh heh heh heh hh,  
**[heh heh heh heh hh,]**
- ((lines omitted))*
- 28 Kim: ㅎㅎ 아 >그래서< 제가,  
heh oh >so< I,  
**heh oh so I,**
- 29 Sun: 네:.=  
ye:s.  
**ye:s.=**
- 30 Kim: =쫘- 조- 자거나 이래야지:;  
=a bit- doze- sleep like that  
**=need to be doz- sleeping or something,**
- 31 Sun: °네°.  
yes  
**'yes.°**
- 32 Kim: 남자들끼리 또 따로 어디 갈꺼아냐. 으흐, [↑하하하하, ]  
men among themselves again separately somewhere go heh hahahaha  
**so guys can go somewhere else heh [h ↑ahahahaha,]**
- 33 Sun: [ ((박수)) ]  
**[((clapping))]**